



March 1, 2015

Dear Members of the CT Appropriations Committee,

The Coventry STEPS Collaborative is a 50+ member organization that links professionals in the community (Board of Education, Town employees, and early childhood providers) with community members and parents to ensure that ALL Coventry children are Nurtured, Healthy and Engaged and Successful Learners. Coventry STEPS offers resources and supports on a local level, which the Office of Early Childhood is simply not equipped to do. The funds dedicated to local early childhood collaboratives in the State of CT OEC budget (\$900,000) are matched by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund and the Child's Health and Development Institute of CT. These funds also leverage other funds from federal, state and local sources.

The Coventry STEPS Collaborative has had many important successes over the last 6 years. These successes include, but are not limited to:

Coventry STEPS has developed important and relevant ways to communication with parents about events and resources available in the community. Some examples of these communications include the Town of Coventry Early Childhood Resource Guide, a website, and a facebook page. Coventry STEPS has a partnership with the Town Clerk's office to send out a birth packet to all families who have a new baby. The packet is filled with valuable local and state resources that can help a family connect with what services and programs they may need. Included in this packet is a Coventry Early Childhood Resource Guide.

Coventry STEPS has worked hard over the past several years at connecting parents with one another. Coventry is a small, semi-rural town and parents of young children consistently report feeling isolated and lacking a social support network. One of the goals of Coventry STEPS is the development of a Family Resource Center, which would offer consistent parent support and education opportunities for families with young children in Coventry. A Family Resource Center would connect parents and their children to one another and to their community, during the most critical time in a child's development, birth –age 3. This past year, Coventry STEPS worked closely with the Superintendent of Coventry Schools to spearhead a Preschool Feasibility Committee. The committee produced a report about the current conditions of preschool programming and the need to expand those offerings, as well as create a Family Resource Center.

Coventry STEPS has supported many local early literacy initiatives, including advocating for the local Library to increase Library hours for young children, distribution of board books and advocating for additional reading support at the schools. Additionally, Coventry STEPS helped make the connections between the schools and local library staff for the improvement of our local summer reading program.

Coventry STEPS has secured additional grant funds to offer the UCONN People Empowering People for the last two years. 15 Coventry parents have participated in these two classes. Coventry also secured grant funding to collect data from the yellow health forms (preschool students) to better understand the health needs of very young children.



Coventry STEPS has worked to support better health among all Coventry children. Coventry STEPS raised the awareness on the outdated School Wellness Policies, which have since been updated. Coventry STEPS has worked closely with Parks & Recreation and the Coventry Public Schools to increase physical fitness opportunities. Due to these efforts, Coventry has seen tremendous improvement in % of 4th grade students passing all 4 physical fitness tests.

Coventry STEPS has raised the importance of early childhood to a new level and has brought many, many key stakeholders along with parents together to discuss local issues and find solutions. Coventry STEPS works on local issues with local stakeholders. It is essential to keep the funding for Early Childhood Collaboratives in the OEC budget to ensure that this very important work continues.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Hassler

Coventry STEPS Coordinator